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Douglas County Sheriff John Hanlin speaks during a news conference, Saturday in Roseburg.

Important to identify shooter

Of all the terrible things that happened last week in Roseburg, the Douglas County Sheriff’s decision to withhold the name of the shooter is not among the worst.

But it is something that deserves an explanation from media, like ours, who published the name and photo of a hateful human being — and as much of a life story as we could.

In the first press conference Sheriff John Hanlin gave to both local and national media, he said no one in his office would utter the name of the murderer.

“I will not give him the credit he probably sought prior to this horrific and cowardly act,” the sheriff said.

We can certainly understand Hanlin’s motivation, and for a moment it seemed a pretty Southern Oregon thing to do. But after further review, Hanlin’s reasoning sets a dangerous precedent.

It is the media’s job to tell you the truth — when it is good news but even more importantly when it is bad. Certainly, some take that job more seriously than others. Watching national television stations report on the shooting in the immediate aftermath, without anyone from their company having even set foot in Douglas County — much less the campus of Umpqua Community College — was brutal. The assumptions and accusations were flying, but facts were few and far between.

But responsible and professional media worked hard to learn what happened — and refused to publish and pass along rumors and gossip.

Sure, there are still things we don’t yet know about what happened inside that school. The story will continue to be tweaked and refined and the truth — as best we will ever know it — will be released when it is known. That will take months, if not years.

The identity, motivation and mental health of the shooter is not just relevant to the story, it is the crux of this tragedy. Understanding the shooter is extremely important to trying to reduce and guard against future mass shootings. It doesn’t glorify the act, but it does shine light into the complex soils that produce mass murderers.

And timely, true information helps combat the crazies out there. Already, the same people who argue that Sandy Hook and Columbine were conspiracies faked by the government have their same theories about Roseburg. Any information that authorities try to hide just fuels that kind of thinking.

On the flip side, it is the media’s job to make this a better world. And there are times when we will not publish information that is debilitating and dangerous to a community. Teenage suicide is one such instance. The science is clear that media coverage can spur copycats, and we adjust our coverage with that in mind.

Still, in most cases ignorance is the enemy. Professional media organizations and our readers deserve the whole and complete truth. In order to do that, we require that public officials not hide important details.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

The big university

Many American universities were founded as religious institutions, explicitly designed to cultivate their students’ spiritual and moral natures. But over the course of the 20th century they became officially or effectively secular.

Religious rituals like mandatory chapel services were dropped. Academic research and teaching replaced character formation at the core of the university’s mission.

Administrators and professors dropped spiritual language and moral prescription either because they didn’t know what to say or because they didn’t want to alienate any part of their diversifying constituencies. The humanities departments became less important, while parents ratcheted up the pressure for career training.

Universities are more professional and glittering than ever, but in some ways there is emptiness deep down. Students are taught how to do things, but many are not forced to reflect on why they should do them or what we are here for. They are given many career options, but they are on their own when it comes to developing criteria to determine which vocation would lead to the fullest life.

But things are changing. On almost every campus faculty members and administrators are trying to stem the careerist tide and to widen the system’s narrow definition of achievement. Institutes are popping up — with interdisciplinary humanities programs and even meditation centers — designed to cultivate the whole student: the emotional, spiritual and moral sides and not just the intellectual.

Technology is also forcing change. Online courses make the transmission of information a commodity. If colleges are going to justify themselves, they are going to have to thrive at those things that require physical proximity. That includes moral and spiritual development. Very few of us cultivate our souls as hermits. We do it through small groups and relationships and in social contexts.

In short, for the past many decades colleges narrowed down to focus on professional academic disciplines, but now there are a series of forces leading them to widen out so that they leave a mark on the full human being.

The trick is to find a way to talk about moral and spiritual things while respecting diversity. Universities might do that by taking responsibility for four important tasks.

First, reveal moral options. We’re the inheritors of an array of moral traditions. There’s the Greek tradition emphasizing honor, glory and courage, the Jewish tradition emphasizing justice and law, the Christian tradition emphasizing surrender and grace, the scientific tradition emphasizing reason and

logic, and so on.

Colleges can insist that students at least become familiar with these different moral ecologies. Then it’s up to the students to figure out which one or which combination is best to live by.

Second, foster transcendent experiences. If a student spends four years in regular and concentrated contact with beauty — with poetry or music, extended time in a cathedral, serving a child with Down syndrome, waking up with loving friends on a mountain — there’s a good chance something transcendent and imagination-altering will happen.

Third, investigate current loves and teach new things to love. On her great blog, Brain Pickings, Maria Popova quotes a passage from Nietzsche on how to find your identity: “Let the young soul survey its own life with a view of the following question: ‘What have you truly loved thus far? What has ever uplifted your soul, what has dominated and delighted it at the same time?’” Line up these revered objects in a row, Nietzsche says, and they will reveal your fundamental self.

To lead a full future life, meanwhile, students have to find new things to love: a field of interest, an activity, a spouse, community, philosophy or faith. College is about exposing students to many things and creating an aphrodisiac atmosphere so that they might fall in lifelong love with a few.

Fourth, apply the humanities. The social sciences are not shy about applying their disciplines to real life. But literary critics, philosophers and art historians are shy about applying their knowledge to real life because it might seem too Oprahesque or self-helpy. They are afraid of being prescriptive because they idolize individual choice.

But the great works of art and literature have a lot to say on how to tackle the concrete challenges of living, like how to escape the chains of public opinion, how to cope with grief or how to build loving friendships. Instead of organizing classes around academic concepts — 19th-century French literature — more could be organized around the concrete challenges students will face in the first decade after graduation.

It’s tough to know how much philosophical instruction anybody can absorb at age 20, before most of life has happened, but seeds can be planted. Universities could more intentionally provide those enchanted goods that the marketplace doesn’t offer. If that happens, the future of the university will be found in its original moral and spiritual mission, but secularized, and in an open and aspiring way.

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David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Arm teachers, end gun-free zones

Gun-free zones are bad for everybody. They are good in theory, but the reality is that they only amplify the carnage in a mass shooting. The only gun-free zones that have been a success are ones with screening and armed police present.

Whether you support the Second Amendment or not, you must accept the fact that guns are everywhere in our society. You can’t protect people with a sign and an invisible bubble. Gun-free zones only stop the people who follow the rule of law and do not intend to kill anyone. They are a prime target for the psychos that carry out mass shootings in this country, and it is their first choice for finding fame and victims who can’t fight back.

The mass shooting that happened Oct. 1 in Roseburg took the police six minutes to respond. I have to ask, if your loved one were in that building would you rather they had a cell phone in their hand, or a means to fight back? The shooter even had the time to ask people their religion before shooting them in the head.

I am the parent of a college freshman and have children in primary and secondary schools, so I am as concerned as any other parent would be when I see

something bad happen. I personally would sleep better at night if I knew their teachers were armed and trained to respond. Armed teachers would deter the cowards who carry out these terrible acts. It’s sad that the staff in our schools currently train to run and hide. That may save a few lives, but it does not stop a killer who is allowed to hunt his victims until police respond.

The sad truth is that there is no way to stop someone who intends to take another life, but you can sure cut the number of victims by a rapid armed response. We as a society need to get some common sense and do what’s right by allowing concealed carry permit holders to exercise their right in our schools, local hospitals, etc. We cannot prevent the evil act that happened last week, but together we can limit it in the future.

The only way to insure the safety of the people in an armed society is to eliminate unenforceable gun-free zones.

John Walker
Stanfield

Where’s a police officer when you need one?

Recently my neighbor came over to say that he had just come out of the Mexican restaurant on Main Street and saw a car do a

U-turn on the speed bump in the 300 block of Main. My question is, why is it that we never seem to have a police officer patrolling Main Street anymore? Mid-block U-turns are illegal anywhere in the state of Oregon, so why is it that it is legal in the city of Pendleton? And what about speeders in school zones such as Southeast Alexander?

Maybe we need to consolidate the police agencies in the county so we can have better police protection.

Barbara Wright
Pendleton

Visits by foreign dignitaries are too expensive, should stop

The recent visit by the Pope was unbelievably expensive. He visited just three cities — Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C. Some estimate the cost just for security in Philadelphia at \$48 million. The World Meeting of Families is attempting to raise \$45 million to help offset these papal expenses. If they do, think of the dozens of really great projects that could be paid for by this money instead of a papal visit. Some say the million visitors coming to see the Pope will spend a lot, but others say these faithful servants are

mostly poor and won’t spend much at all. And by the way, almost none of them will actually see the Pope or even get close. Whatever economic benefit that might be realized will only benefit the cities he visits, not the taxpayer.

I realize this Pope has made great strides for the Catholic Church compared with his predecessors. If you go back far enough you find popes who, for example, had their enemies skewered with sharpened wood poles surrounding the courtyard, doused with oil, then burned to provide light for the Pope’s parties. You don’t have to go back that far to remember the dozens of priests who abused young boys and were simply sent to other locations so they could find an entire new batch of victims. The church knew it was going on and did nothing for many years.

With the violent insanity and threats of Muslim extremists ever-

present, let’s just stop the non-vital visits along with the huge costs and security nightmares they cause.

Let’s just declare a moratorium on visits by all foreign dignitaries for a couple of years. This recent visit by the President of China was mostly lavish dinners and pomp and circumstance. I doubt much of substance was accomplished. The taxpayer picked up the bill.

Our country is \$19 trillion in debt. Let’s have these summits on Skype. If they insist on coming, they pay for their own security. A fair amount is deposited to the U.S. government in advance of their visit with the stipulation that if they go over that amount, they are liable for the balance.

While we are at it, let’s eliminate the amnesty for rotten foreign dignitaries and their offspring who murder U.S. citizens, drive drunk, and just get away with it.

David Burns
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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